

# Getting the Most From Your Mentoring Relationship

Professor Judy Millesen describes mentorship as an “agreement between two people sharing experiences and expertise to help with reflection, decision-making, and action” to improve personal growth and professional development.

The purpose of mentorship is for individuals to help one another grow and develop while providing benefits for everyone involved. The benefits of a mentoring relationship include the transfer of knowledge, experiences, opinions, and ideas. Another benefit of mentorship is the increase of productivity due to the collaborative nature of mentoring.

Mentor relationships can be versatile despite common myths. Mentor relationships can be short-term or long-term. The relationships can be between individuals, peers, or groups. They can also be formal or informal in nature. The goal of mentorship is to align people with common goals.

The two types of mentors are career mentors and psychosocial mentors. A career mentor helps an individual with career advancement. A psychosocial mentor serves as a role model by helping an individual develop skills, confidence, and professional identity.

The three elements to a successful relationship between mentors and mentees are respect, trust, and listening. Respect is gained through proper eye contact, communication, and professional body language. Trust is gained through upholding agreements. Active listening allows for full engagement between mentors and mentees.

Communication is a key factor in achieving successful mentoring relationships. Proper communication involves maintaining eye contact, using professional body language, and making sure to clarify meanings to gain specific information. The mentor relationship requires a written summary of agreements so the parties do not stray away from the goal. It is important to know when it is proper to email, call, or have a face-to-face conversation with a mentor. A mentoring relationship should avoid becoming too dependent on a mentor and both sides should stay actively engaged to avoid a decline in the relationship.

Some advice for mentees include:

1. Identify goals
2. Be willing to learn
3. Actively seek counsel and advice
4. Take responsibility
5. Be open to feedback and coaching
6. Understand the parameters of the relationship
7. Be aware of potential pitfalls and how to deal with a challenging situation

Some advice for mentors include:

1. Recognize that mentee might be uncomfortable asking for help
2. Advise, not manage

3. Listen, counsel, coach, give career advice, and set goals
4. Provide developmental feedback, not criticism
5. Know the mentee sets the pace of the relationship
6. Expand mentee's developmental network and suggest other mentors for certain needs
7. Suggest skills training
8. Be aware of potential pitfalls and how to deal with a challenging situation

The mentor is able to share their wisdom and experience with the mentee. It is also important to be open to experimentation on how to implement new ideas to achieve a common goal. Mentor relationships allow parties to share mutual goals and evaluate the progress made on those common goals. Another important aspect of mentoring relationships is to remember the initial goals and aspirations created before going into the relationship.

People who have been mentored have an increased likelihood of career success. A mentoring relationship helps develop an individual's organizational and professional identity while improving leadership and professional practices among both parties.

*Judy Millesen is an associate professor of public affairs at Ohio University. She provides training in mentoring and leadership for the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at the U.S. Department of State.*

---

## **Bouncing Back from Setbacks**



For many young adults, it's the time of year for decisions. Colleges, graduate schools and many fellowships will soon be sending out letters accepting applicants.

They'll send out far more rejections.

If you've made careful plans and worked hard, getting a rejection when you expected an acceptance can feel like you've suffered an insurmountable setback. But you shouldn't feel that way.

"Ask any successful person how they got to the top," said Larry Sabato, head of the University of Virginia's Center for Politics, "and if they're honest, they will admit suffering loads of losses along the way before their big break happened."

Take the example of Warren Buffett, considered one of the most successful investors and one of the wealthiest men in the world. His plan to attend Harvard Business School as a young man ended with a rejection letter. Yet today he sees that rejection as a pivotal incident in his life. It led him to another business school he hadn't previously considered, where he found the [mentors](#) he says shaped his career. "Everything that has happened in my life that I thought was a crushing event at the time," Buffett told the Wall Street Journal, "has turned out for the better."

Steven Spielberg's path to directing 32 films and becoming the top-grossing director in movies began with not one, but two rejections from the film school at the University of Southern California. So Spielberg took low-paying jobs in the [film industry](#) until he was able to convince a studio to take a chance on him.

"Just remember this:" said Sabato, "You can't win a race you don't enter. Persevere. Keep trying. Every experience, even — or especially — an unsuccessful one, helps you to do a bit better the next time."

## How you can move forward

If you recently suffered a setback in your education or career, consider these tips from Joyce E.A. Russell and plan your next move. Russell writes the “Career Coach” column for the Washington Post and teaches at the Robert H. Smith School of Business at the University of Maryland.

## Don't gloss over your disappointment

“It’s natural to be disappointed,” Russell said. Upon receiving a setback, she recommends, get outside for physical activity. “Even if it’s just a walk or a run, it’ll free up your brain. You’re not going to immediately start action-planning. Separate from it, then find when to come back to it and say, ‘Can I learn something from this?’”

## Assess the setback

“You should try to identify for yourself the reasons you weren’t successful,” Russell said, “but you should also get feedback from people in the field you’re applying to.” If you don’t have access to the decision makers to find out why your application wasn’t successful, try to contact people who have been accepted to the program you’re applying to for advice.

## Keep training

“There are a lot of parallels between people who are successful as athletes and people who are successful in business,” Russell said. Not only are they persistent, but they are continually working to get better. “If you keep applying, but your resume doesn’t look any different, that’s not going to get you there. People who are successful in business or as athletes are constantly training, constantly trying to improve themselves.”

---

# Professional Networking 101

Whether you’re a student, professional, or entrepreneur, having a strong network can make a world of difference when it comes to achieving your goals. While professional networking is often associated with job hunting, its benefits are numerous: in addition to career opportunities, your professional network may offer business leads, knowledge resources, and even lasting friendships.

**So what exactly is professional networking?** Put simply, it’s the process of deliberately building and maintaining relationships with others in your professional sphere. In the “[Networking to Get Ahead](#)” lesson, Sadhana Hall shares this insight:

*To be the best at what you do, you need to surround yourself with people who inspire you, who motivate you, and who challenge you. People who ask you difficult questions and provide honest feedback. Networking is the practice of intentionally seeking out these people...it’s just as tangible and necessary as your technical skills.*

Professional networking involves meeting a variety of people who you may not otherwise meet or socialize with. The key is to keep an open mind: even people with whom you have little in common could turn out to be some of your most valuable connections.

## HOW TO BUILD YOUR NETWORK

Keep in mind that building your professional network is a *process* that requires sincerity and dedication; it can't be done overnight. That said, there are many opportunities to establish useful relationships. For example:

- **Reach out to your personal contacts:** While they may not share your career interests, your personal contacts are extremely valuable when it comes to networking. Start by creating a list of everyone you know: friends, family, and neighbors, as well as current and past employers, coworkers, teachers, and classmates. Reach out to these people and share your goals, plans, and questions with them; chances are, they can refer you to others who may be helpful.
- **Request informational interviews:** An informational interview is a meeting to gain insight and/or advice from someone with experience in your field of interest. Unlike a job interview, you initiate and conduct the interview with someone who you hope to learn from. For helpful tips, check out our resource on [How to Have a Successful Informational Interview](#).
- **Attend conferences or formal networking events:** Industry and/or professional events present a ripe opportunity to build your network: it is perfectly acceptable to strike up a conversation with a stranger in this context. Sadhana Hall recommends the following approach: "Begin your conversation with what you know about the person or the organization, talk about your common interests, and build your conversation from there. Let them know how you can possibly help them."
- **Leverage digital networks:** Social media, such as LinkedIn and Facebook, are optimal for connecting with people who have similar professional interests and goals. A good way to start is by asking people you already know to make "digital introductions" with people you would like to network with (e.g., by email or LinkedIn message). You can also join online groups or forums to build relationships with people who share your interests.

**Plus:** Don't forget to join the [YALI Network face2face group](#) on Facebook to connect with like-minded leaders and learn about important events in your community!

## HOW TO MAINTAIN YOUR NETWORK

Sadhana Hall reminds us to think of a professional network as "something that is alive and requires time and attention to stay healthy and relevant." It is not enough to call upon your contacts only when you need their help: you must also think about how you can help them. For example:

- **Pass along relevant information:** Reach out to your contacts when something reminds you of them, such as an article or event they might like. Simple gestures such as these clearly demonstrate that you are thinking of others' needs.
- **Facilitate mutually beneficial introductions:** If you know two people who share similar interests or goals, connect them! You can facilitate an introduction in-person (if you have the opportunity), use social media such as LinkedIn, or send both parties an email. Be sure to mention how you know each person and how they might benefit from connecting.
- **Reach out in advance of a job search:** In the event that you are looking for a new job, it's appropriate to call upon your professional network to help you. You can request job leads or relevant contacts for informational interviews, and/or seek advice from your network. Keep your

contacts informed of your progress, and *always* acknowledge their assistance with a note of thanks.

Though building a professional network can be challenging at first, your efforts will be worthwhile in the long term. And remember: the best time to build relationships is *before* you need them. Good luck!

---

## Advance your career by using an essay to talk yourself up

(Shutterstock)



Whether you're writing an [essay](#) to apply for admission to university, graduate school or the [Mandela Washington Fellowship](#) to take your career to the next level, your job is the same: demonstrate to the decisionmakers that you're the best choice.

### **Emphasize outcomes**

"Sometimes we focus on things we've done" — an initiative or a job we undertook — "but we don't talk about what the result of that was," said executive coach Patty Beach, who is a managing partner of LeadershipSmarts. By describing the tangible benefits created by your previous work, you can overcome what Beach calls the "'So what?' factor," which leaves the decisionmakers uncertain whether your work had any measurable value or not.

### **Remember three things**

Beach suggests thinking about three things before writing an essay: what you're good at (your natural and cultivated talents), what you're passionate about (the area to which you'll direct your talents), and how what you're applying for will help further your goals. "If you can effectively communicate those three things, you put yourself in the best position to be selected."

### **Enough but not too much**

Shawn Abbott, dean of admissions at New York University, has seen more than enough admissions essays to know what works when it comes to selling yourself to an admissions board. He suggests limiting your personal statement to one page. "Admissions officers are reading hundreds, if not thousands, of applications. We have to be able to read quickly, and you want to capture our attention. One page is enough."

### **If it's factual, it's not bragging**

Your essay is the first way an employer or school gets to know you, and you are competing against



other qualified candidates.

“Your ability to tell — to communicate — about yourself is absolutely critical. If you don’t communicate your strengths, accomplishments and life stories effectively, you put yourself at a disadvantage,” said Lynell Engelmeyer, an admissions expert at [CollegeRaptor.com](https://CollegeRaptor.com). Many are uncomfortable communicating their strengths and accomplishments, but if you keep descriptions factual, such as what you have created or managed, awards you have won, or successes you have achieved while overcoming challenges, “you’d be surprised at the context you can provide to your reader,” to give them “a very full picture of who you are” without sounding boastful, she said.

---

## Writing an exciting personal biography

YALI Network member types at a computer. (State Department)



An attention-grabbing biography is an important resource for any professional. This biography can be used as part of your resume/CV, school or Fellowship applications, on your social media pages, in cover letters, and much more. It can be a key factor in decisions as to whether or not you are accepted for a new position or opportunity. It needs to be polished, thorough, and capture who you are in just a few sentences. Below are our top tips for creating an exciting personal biography.

### Top Biography Tips

1. **Develop an outline** or fill out the [YALI Network Biography Questionnaire](#) [PDF 107 kb] to get started. Then, remember you don’t have to use every idea—pare down your content to the best of the best. Use the Biography Questionnaire as a resource to build your own personal narrative – it is not a requirement for any applications or the YALI Network.
2. Keep it short—aim for one paragraph. Readers will spend a minute at most on your biography so make sure you only include the **most important and relevant information**.
3. Use the third person, which is **more professional than first person**. Third person would be “John moved to Nigeria when he was 12” Instead of “I moved to Nigeria when I was 12.”
4. When describing your accomplishments, don’t write a long list. **Select one or two** that you are most proud of and provide specifics.
  - a. **Can be improved:** Sam volunteers at his local school, has two advanced degrees, speaks three languages, and is passionate about music education.
  - b. **Good:** Sam created a choir program for underprivileged girls. He asked the telecom company where he worked in advertising if they would be interested in mentoring the girls. By the end of the first year, more than 20 girls had received not only a music education, but also gained new

computer and other professional skills.

5. Avoid careless mistakes—**take your time** and don't wait until the last minute to write your bio. If you get stuck, step away to clear your mind. Make sure you edit the bio multiple times and ask someone you trust to edit it as well.

6. Talk about your **specific, achievable goals**. Stating that you plan to become a tech entrepreneur is vague; instead, discuss a specific goal, like starting a company that develops digital learning tools and programs for schools.

7. **Don't forget the basics**. Even though your bio should be short, make sure to include your name, profession, education, years of experience, etc.

---

## Using LinkedIn to Tell Your Organization's Story

Did you know that nearly 5,000 YALI Network members use the [YALI Network LinkedIn Group](#) to connect with one another and to grow their professional networks?

LinkedIn is a business-oriented social network that helps its users make professional connections, find jobs, discover leads and more. Users create their own professional profiles — similar to a digital resume — and establish connections with colleagues, potential partners and businesses.

If you are looking to share stories with an educated, affluent and professional audience, consider using LinkedIn. Its ability to engage a highly targeted, donor-rich demographic makes it a powerful distribution channel for social impact organizations.

The best way to share stories on LinkedIn is through status updates on your organization's Company Page. When sharing content on LinkedIn, be sure to post links and use images. Posts with links to other content have twice the engagement rate of posts without, and posts with images have a 98 percent higher comment rate.

Organizations should engage with their LinkedIn followers on a regular basis by encouraging them to participate in the conversations spurred by the stories you share in your status updates. You can further this participation by asking follow-up questions and writing status updates with clear calls to action.

To increase your organization's visibility on LinkedIn, you should create original content, encourage others to share your content, and give people a clear reason to engage with your content.

This article is adapted from Hatch for Good's [Guide to LinkedIn](#). Hatch for Good is a platform that provides people and organizations with the tools they need to create powerful stories and inspire



positive action in the digital age. Visit [Hatch for Good's website](#) to view additional resources.

---